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Foster boy's death reveals wider neglect

Detroit center endangered or lost track of dozens, state says

BY JACK KRESNAK

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

September 20, 2006

After the Aug. 16 killing of a 2-year-old boy in a foster home licensed through the Lula Belle Stewart Center in Detroit, a team of seven state child abuse investigators took a closer look at how the agency was caring for its 106 other foster children.

What the investigators found was startling:

- Seven of the center's foster children were in placements deemed dangerous or unacceptable and were immediately pulled out.
- Six children were not in the homes where the Lula Belle Stewart Center said they were, including two who were living in other states without the knowledge of the state Department of Human Services.
- Twenty-one children could not even be located immediately. All but two have since been found, but two remain among 266 missing foster children statewide, the vast majority of them runaways.

The disturbing pattern of problems at the Lula Belle Stewart Center is documented in an updated state licensing report obtained Tuesday by the Free Press.

The center's license was suspended shortly after 2-year-old Isaac Lethbridge was beaten to death inside the Detroit foster home of Charlise Adams-Rogers, a placement made by the Stewart Center.

Detroit police are continuing to investigate Isaac's death and have not made an arrest.

"This is an enormous tragedy and continues to have the highest level of attention in the department," DHS spokeswoman Maureen Sorbet said Tuesday. "The safety of children is our primary responsibility."

After Isaac's death, an initial licensing report showed that some of the Stewart Center's foster care workers had failed to report Isaac's suspected abuse to Child Protective Services, as required by law.



Isaac Lethbridge, 2, was beaten to death in a Stewart Center foster home. The center is appealing its state license suspension.

About the Stewart Center

The Lula Belle Stewart Center is a nonprofit foster care agency that is among 241 private foster care and group home agencies licensed by the state's Department of Human Services.

The center, located at 1534 Webb in Detroit, was first licensed as a child-placement agency

Foster boy's death reveals wider neglect

Sorbet said Tuesday she was unable to answer why the DHS had not caught the problems at the Stewart Center earlier. She said the center is only the second to incur a suspended license in the last few years.

The DHS's Office of Children and Adult Licensing is seeking to permanently revoke the center's license to place children in foster care. The center is appealing the license suspension and the revocation effort in a hearing that began Tuesday in Detroit before state Administrative Law Judge Carole Engle.

Janet Burch, the Stewart Center's interim director who came to the troubled agency on Aug. 1, was present for Tuesday's hearing but on the advice of the center's lawyer declined to comment.

How foster care is monitored

Private foster care agencies receive from the state daily administrative rates to supervise foster children that range from \$18.48 to about \$33, depending on the difficulty of care of individual children. Foster parents receive basic rates of about \$12 to \$17 per day per child or more, depending on the level of care required.

Sorbet said the DHS's licensing office monitors how the state's 241 private child-placing agencies comply with rules and regulations. As part of the process, personnel files and some case files at each agency are audited every other year and some agencies are audited at random in off years, she said.

Other DHS workers monitor how the private agencies are supervising the children assigned to their care. That monitoring involves reviewing documents related to the children's care but does not include actually seeing the foster children unless someone files a complaint.

The state's latest licensing report, however, said workers at the Stewart Center often misled the DHS and family court judges about the care of children under the center's supervision.

From Aug. 17 to Aug. 24, according to the state's latest report, DHS child abuse investigators tried to visit 51 of the Stewart Center's 84 licensed foster homes in an attempt to see 106 children the center's documents listed as being placed in those homes.

In five cases where a Lula Belle Stewart Center foster care worker had specific knowledge of possible child abuse or neglect, the center failed to initiate a special investigation as required by the state, the report says.

Investigators finds other lapses

These are among the other problems the state found:

- A foster parent listed by the Stewart Center as being deceased was alive and caring for three adopted children.

in 1993. It has 84 licensed foster homes, although state officials said only 51 homes had been assigned children.

From 1997 to July 31, 2006, the center's executive director was Edna Walker of Detroit. Walker, who retired to care for a dying aunt, said recently that she has been too busy to look into the problems at her former agency.

"Having separated from the agency, I'm not in touch with what's really going on," Walker said. "I know in general that it is a very horrendous situation, but I'm just totally in the dark on Lula Belle."

The center is named for the late Dr. Lula Belle Stewart, Detroit's first African-American pediatric cardiologist.

Jack Kresnak

- Four homes listed as licensed foster homes were vacant and one foster home had two adults living there who had not been cleared by the center through criminal background and Child Protective Services records checks -- a requirement for adults living in foster homes under state licensing regulations.
- A foster home that the center said was caring for four children actually had only one child. Two children had been moved and the foster parent told investigators the fourth child never was in her care.
- Another foster parent told CPS investigators that a child listed by the Stewart Center as being in her home had not lived there for four years. That foster parent also said that no workers from the center had been in her home for more than a year. Foster care workers for private child-placement agencies are required by the state to visit foster children in their homes at least once every 30 days.
- Another foster parent reported that a child in her home had run away on July 6, 2006, but the foster parent said the center never contacted her further about the missing child. Another foster parent said no Stewart Center worker had visited her home since October 2005.
- One foster child had been placed by the center into a foster home that state licensing records show had been closed in March 2004.
- Four foster homes listed by the Stewart Center as having foster children in fact did not have any.

State licensing workers, who removed all foster care files from the Stewart Center on Aug. 21, said foster care licenses had expired for 26 of the center's 84 homes from October 2001 to June 2006. The center later renewed some of the licenses.

After the license suspension, the cases of all foster children under the Stewart Center's supervision were taken over by the DHS, which then assigned those children and foster parents to at least 15 other private foster care agencies.

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State Worker Testifies In Lisa Holland Case

Sep 20, 2006 11:31 AM EDT

(TV5) -- The woman who pushed through little Ricky's Holland's adoption took the witness stand in his mother's murder trial.

September 19th that state worker maintains there were no signs that would have caused her to stop the adoption.

State adoption specialist Melissa Sewell says everything appeared in order at the Holland household when she took over Ricky's adoption case in 2002 from another worker. She did not find what another counselor from Jackson did.



Earlier in the day a Catholic Services Counselor from Jackson testified she suspected child abuse but her reports were determined unsubstantiated by the state. Any problems with Ricky's behavior, she says Lisa handled properly.

The only major problems seemed to be coming from Ricky's sister Catherine who was called a problem because she was facing her terrible twos. Lisa told Sewell Ricky's problems were getting better and he was disciplined with extra homework.

Sewell says she accepted everything Lisa and Tim told her about Ricky and the other children's problems at face value, that she had no real way of checking it out.

The only real thing right now, is seven year old Ricky Holland is dead and his mother stands accused of first degree murder and child abuse.



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Therapist: Ricky said rope left mark on wrist

BY JACK KRESNAK

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

September 20, 2006

Another grim story emerged Tuesday about life in Ricky Holland's adoptive home during the second day of testimony in the murder trial for his mother, Lisa Holland.

A burn mark on the boy's left wrist caught the attention of a Jackson County therapist working with Ricky in February 2002.

She asked the then 4-year-old whether the mark was caused by the family's dog dragging him around on its leash.

"No," Ricky told therapist Susan Honeck of the Catholic Charities of Jackson child welfare agency. The mark came from "the rope that they tie me in bed with at night," he told her, according to testimony.

Honeck said she reported the suspected child abuse to Child Protective Services, as she is required to do by law.

A week later, when Honeck saw that the apparent rope burn on Ricky's wrist was healing, he told her he'd made a deal with his mother: "I won't pee on the floor and she won't tie me up," the boy said.

Later, Honeck said she got a letter from protective services saying an investigator had looked at her complaint and could not substantiate it.

Holland, 33, is charged with open murder and first-degree child abuse in the July 2005 death of Ricky, who had come to her licensed foster home in October 2000.

Holland and her husband, 37-year-old Tim Holland, later adopted Ricky.

Tim Holland pleaded guilty to second-degree murder in Ricky's death on Sept. 5 and promised to testify against his wife at her jury trial now under way before Ingham County Circuit Judge Paula Manderfield.

Also testifying Tuesday were three social services workers, Ricky's first-grade teacher and an adoptions specialist, who said that the Hollands received a \$907 monthly subsidy due to the difficulty of his care.

The boy had been diagnosed by a child psychiatrist as having attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, opposition-defiant disorder and being bipolar.



Ricky Holland, 7, died in July 2005. His adoptive mother, Lisa Holland, is charged in his death.

Testimony is expected to take four to six weeks.

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Published September 20, 2006

Social worker reported rope burns on Ricky

Boy said he was tied in bed at night, court told

By Kevin Grasha
Lansing State Journal

What's next

- Lisa Holland's trial continues today in Ingham County Circuit Court. Expected to testify are officials from Foote Hospital in Jackson as well as Blue Cross and Blue Shield, Ricky's Head Start teacher from Jackson and Ingham County sheriff's Detective Billy Mitchell.

Ricky Holland had rope burns on his left wrist that he said were caused by his foster parents, a social worker testified Tuesday on the second day of Lisa Holland's trial.

Susan Honeck, who held weekly counseling sessions with Ricky for about 10 months, said that on Feb. 21, 2002, she noticed the wounds during play therapy with Ricky, who was 4 years old at the time. Tim and Lisa Holland were his foster parents before adopting him.

When she asked about the burns, which Honeck described as very severe, Ricky told her: "It's from the rope that they tie me in bed with at night," Honeck testified.

That same day, the Jackson County social worker said, she filed a child abuse and neglect report with Child Protective Services. But a week later, she received a notice that her report had not been substantiated.

Lisa Holland is charged with murder and child abuse in the death of her adopted son, Ricky. Her husband, Tim Holland, has pleaded guilty to second-degree murder and will likely testify against her. Lisa has said Tim killed Ricky.

During a play therapy session the next week, Honeck noticed Ricky's wrist was healing.

Ricky told her, she said, that Lisa Holland had made a deal with him.

"I won't pee on the floor, and she won't tie me up," Honeck recalled Ricky saying.

Honeck also said February 2002 was the only time she noticed injuries or suspected abuse.

The Hollands lived in Jackson until moving to Williamston in May 2005.

Honeck said it was a difficult time for Ricky because the state was in the process of terminating the parental rights of his biological mother and father.

She told Lisa Holland's co-counsel Andrew Abood that Ricky was concerned his biological father might take him from the Hollands.

Ricky also told her that he had been hit by one of his biological mother's boyfriends, Honeck testified.

Also Tuesday, an official from the state Department of Human Services said the Hollands received a \$907 monthly subsidy for Ricky's care.

About \$450 of that was based on Ricky's special needs, said Molly Brown, a DHS analyst. She said Ricky qualified for the highest dollar amount, based on documentation provided by Lisa Holland.

In opening arguments Monday, Assistant Prosecutor Mike Ferency implied that Lisa Holland exaggerated Ricky's condition for financial gain.

Ricky's first-grade teacher testified Tuesday that Lisa insisted Ricky wear a harness on the special education bus he rode to school.

The harness was prescribed by a Jackson child psychiatrist who diagnosed Ricky with at least four conditions, including attention-deficit (hyperactivity) disorder.

But Peggy Cox, a teacher at Cascades Elementary in Jackson, said she refused to put Ricky in the harness.

When asked why, she said, "It would be humiliating."

Melissa Sewell, a DHS adoption specialist, testified that during a visit to the Hollands' Jackson home, she noticed a video camera mounted in a corner of the ceiling.

She said it appeared to be a surveillance camera.

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September 20, 2006

Witness: State ignored abuse

Social worker testifies Ricky was tied up, handcuffed before Hollands adopted 7-year-old.

Karen Bouffard / The Detroit News

LANSING -- State officials dismissed a complaint that Ricky Holland was tied with a dog rope and handcuffed before he was adopted by the parents charged with his murder, a social worker alleged Tuesday.

Testifying in the murder trial of the 7-year-old's adoptive mother, Lisa Holland, social worker Susan Honeck said she found evidence of abuse four years before the Williamston boy was found dead in a marshy field in January.

State Children's Protective Services agents not only deemed the 2002 complaint "unsubstantiated," but also allowed Lisa and Tim Holland to adopt the foster child they are accused of killing, Honeck told an Ingham County jury.

"I noticed a very deep rope burn on his wrist with scabs ... Ricky told me it was from the dog rope. I asked him 'Did he take his dog for a walk?' He said, 'No, it's the rope they tie me in bed with at night,' " testified Honeck, a social worker for Catholic Charities of Jackson who was hired to give play therapy to Ricky by the state Department of Human Services, then the Family Independence Agency.

"He added that the handcuffs were very cold on his legs as well."

Her testimony adds to the list of school employees and neighbors who alleged during earlier hearings that they notified the state that Ricky was abused before he died. Holland's parents reported him missing in July 2005.

Tim Holland, 37, who pleaded guilty to second-degree murder this month, led detectives to his body earlier this year.

Honeck said the day she noticed the injuries, Feb. 21, 2002, she immediately informed Ricky's psychiatrist, his state foster care worker and filed a complaint.

"The next week, I saw Ricky and checked his wrists and ankles and found they were healing," she said. "I asked him if he was still being tied up. He said, 'No. We made a deal. I won't pee on the floor and she won't tie me up.' "

On April 18, Ricky didn't show up for his therapy appointment, Honeck testified.

"I called the foster care worker and she notified me his counseling was terminated," she said.

Also Tuesday, a state adoption specialist acknowledged to jurors that she couldn't recall ever seeing Ricky since the adoption became final in October 2003.

Melissa Sewall-Finch, who works for the Michigan Department of Human Services, said she met with the family every three months thereafter because the Hollands were in the process of adopting Ricky's siblings. In all, the Williamston family adopted Ricky, two of his brothers and his sister.

She wasn't able to explain why Ricky was always missing from the home. Tim Holland has alleged the abuse was ongoing for years.

Sewall-Finch's last visit to the home was on Feb. 5, 2005 -- months before Ricky disappeared. Even after his disappearance, the state allowed the Hollands to adopt one of Ricky's brothers.

The children are now in the care of Tim Holland's relatives.

Molly Brown, a state adoption subsidy specialist, testified the Hollands received \$907 per month in state subsidies for Ricky. The total amount they received for all children is unclear.

Brown said the couple was paid \$2,205 to care for Ricky and two siblings, but did not testify about how much they received for the third.

Testimony is expected to resume today before Circuit Judge Paula Manderfield. Lisa Holland, 34, faces life in prison if convicted.

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Drugs redux: Legislative GOP revives election gambit on drug testing

A Lansing State Journal editorial – September 20, 2006

On Sept. 9, 2004, Michigan House Republicans unveiled a bill to require drug testing for suspect welfare recipients. The bill passed the House, then died.

On Sept. 14, 2006, Michigan House Republicans introduced House Bill 6481 - a measure to require drug testing for suspect welfare recipients.

Hmm. What happens every even-numbered year in Michigan? Oh yes, elections to the state House.

And those elections, not drug use, is the real motivator behind this piece of legislation.

Michigan politicians have a long, sordid history with drug testing and welfare. The Legislature and then-Gov. John Engler teamed to impose a system of random drug testing for welfare recipients. This "guilty until proven innocent" scheme was immediately challenged in court. And, in 2003, the federal courts finally polished off random testing. Not to be deterred, legislative Republicans came back with the 2004 bill to require testing of suspected drug users who receive welfare.

Like its 2004 predecessor, HB 6481 has two fundamental flaws:

- First, it targets drug testing for a single category of state aid recipients. As we wrote about the 2004 bill: "Substance abuse isn't found just in the ranks of the poor, you know. It's even been found in the halls of the Capitol and in corporate suites.

"Any credible drug-screening effort should target the powerful as well as the powerless."

- Second, this bill would place undetermined costs and strains on a state budget and work force that's been relentlessly trimmed in recent years.

HB 6481 calls for a pilot program. That helps reduce costs. But, if the pilot program works - and backers of the bill should think it will - how soon would the testing go statewide? And at what cost?

If lawmakers really want voters to think they are serious about drug use, the first provision of any bill should be that drug testing applies to them, too. Anything short of that is just poor-bashing for political gain.

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Rule Change Would Affect Abuse Cases

MIRS, Tuesday, September 19, 2006

The Michigan Supreme Court is considering adopting a rule change that would allow a child's statement of abuse or neglect to be brought into evidence by the person who heard the kid make the statement.

Currently court evidence rules bar evidence based on what someone else told a witness, but there are some exceptions. The law allows for "the person to whom the statement is made," to testify on a child's behalf in cases "regarding an act of child abuse, child neglect, sexual abuse or sexual exploitation."

The rule change would expand this law to allow "any person who heard the child make the statement" to testify. The rule would apply to kids that are younger than 10 or those who are younger than 18 and developmentally disabled.

The proposal is on the Michigan Supreme Court's public hearing agenda which will start at 9:30 a.m., Wednesday Sept. 27.

The court will also review the following rule changes:

- A change to the Juvenile Code that would allow a family court judge or referee to authorize the removal of a child from a home "upon presentments of proofs," rather than on the basis of a formal petition, which is what the current law requires.
- Require family courts to hold review hearings within 182 days of a child's removal from the home, regardless of whether the child protection trial has been completed
- Give court-appointed lawyers less time to file motions to withdraw from parental rights termination appeals
- Allow an attorney to order only those lower court transcripts needed for an appeal from a court's decision to terminate parental rights.
- The court is also considering the following amendments that would govern bail for defendants in child support so if the defendant is being held on a criminal warrant for failure to pay child support, "the court must set the bond at not less than \$500 or 25 percent of the unpaid support arrearage, whichever is greater, except for good cause shown on the record," the proposed revision states.
- Allow parties in juvenile cases to file records with the court by fax
- Extend from seven to 14 days the time to answer certain motions in the Court of Appeals; the changes would also

Ombudsman Change Prepped

MIRS, Tuesday, September 19, 2006

Today, the House prepped [HB 6440](#), legislation that would move the state's child ombudsman's office from the executive branch to the legislative branch, where it would be placed under the nonpartisan Legislative Service Bureau (LSB).

Politically, the legislation, which is sponsored by Rep. David [LAW](#) (R-Commerce Twp.), is an attempt by Republican lawmakers to publicize the fact that in recent months children have died who were supposedly under the protection of departments run by the administration of Gov. Jennifer [GRANHOLM](#) (See "[Speaker Hits Granholm On Child Protection 'Failures'](#)," 9/07/06).

Similar deaths occurred periodically under previous administrations but generally received less news media attention.

The second and potentially longer-lasting aspect of the bill is that, using the highly-publicized deaths as a backdrop, it would forward efforts, which have been to some extent bipartisan in past legislatures, to limit the control the executive branch has traditionally had on disseminating information about failures in the child protection system (See "[Child Protection Reform Bills Announced](#)," 9/07/06).

The bill could move in both chambers before the Legislature leaves town this week, but there doesn't seem to be any compelling political reason to deliver it to the Governor before the election.

Of course in an election year, the natural reaction of House Democrats has been to rally to their Governor and treat the bill largely as an attack on her administration. Today, the House Democrats offered an alternative approach to loosening the executive branch's control of the children's ombudsman's office.

The plan would have the office placed under the oversight of an independent 8-member panel, with the Governor

Welfare Drug Testing Bill Moves

MIRS, Tuesday, September 19, 2006

Today, on a 5-1-1 vote, the House Government Operations Committee reported out [HB 6481](#), legislation that would require welfare recipients to be drug tested if there was reasonable suspicion that the recipient was under the influence of illegal drugs.

The legislation, which is sponsored by Rep. Leslie [MORTIMER](#) (R-Horton), is similar to legislation that was passed during the final term of Gov. John **ENGLER**. The courts modified that legislation with a consent decree, and the Department of Human Services (DHS) currently operates a program to monitor illegal drug use by welfare recipients that is consistent with the consent decree. [HB 6481](#) would also be consistent with the decree, which is scheduled to end in January.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) is neutral on the bill as long as it remains consistent with the consent decree. In fact Shelli **WEISBERG**, of the ACLU, made a point of thanking Mortimer for working with the ACLU on the bill and appeared to be extremely expert on the details of the legislation. Meanwhile, DHS opposed the bill

Although there may be an outside chance the measure could be passed by both the House and Senate and delivered to the governor, the give a political hot potato prior to the election, indications are that the bill is being brought up at this time primarily to help with Mortimer's re-election bid and the bill won't be taken up by the Senate, which is scheduled to hold its final fall session Wednesday (See "[Mortimer Wants To Revisit Welfare Drug Testing](#)," 9/18/06).

Juvenile center may cut length of stay

Macomb officials to weigh proposal

BY STEVE NEAVLING

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

September 20, 2006

After cost hikes and more than a year of delays, the expansion of the Macomb County Juvenile Justice Center appears on the verge of moving forward with a scaled back plan that officials say is better for taxpayers and troubled youths.

The new proposal is to add fewer beds than originally slated for the center, located in Mt. Clemens, by moving the youths back into their homes sooner with the help of counselors who work with family members.

Also struck from the original plan was a 20-bed wing for abused or neglected children. The state now prefers sending them through the foster-care system, which is less institutional than a juvenile center, said Charles Seidelman, the center's director.

The Budget Committee is to consider the changes at 9 a.m. today.

The original plan was to replace the Macomb County Youth Home, which was dark, leaky and outdated, with a new center that would eventually have 190 beds and programs for juveniles with substance abuse problems and those waiting for their day in court.

The center opened with 80 beds in September 2004. The county has since added an additional 40 beds and now wants to add 20 more -- 50 fewer than originally planned.

The reduction is possible, county officials said, by returning juveniles home with intense family therapy, which courts have done more of during the past year.

"The greatest potential of savings is reducing the length of stay," Seidelman said Tuesday. Placing kids in their homes with follow-up treatment has been more effective at reducing recidivism rates than confining them to detention for long periods, said Macomb County Circuit Chief Judge Antonio Viviano.

"Our mission is to make sure we do everything we can to return these kids to society as constructively and safely as possible," Viviano said. "If we can achieve that mission, we save the county a lot of money."

The project to move the juvenile center to its current location and expand it was estimated at \$19.2 million. The county has already spent that much, partly because of rising construction costs, county



Charles Seidelman, director of the Macomb County Juvenile Center, stands in the residents' living area of the center. "The greatest potential of savings is reducing the length of stay," Seidelman said. (HEATHER ROUSSEAU/Special to the Free Press)

officials said. Officials expect to spend \$2.3 million to finish the expansion and renovations, compared with more than \$4 million if the project wasn't scaled back, Seidelman said.

Officials insist the changes were in response to the success of returning kids home and had nothing to do with the county's tight budget, which is facing a multimillion-dollar deficit.

"We're not saving money at the expense of the kids," Viviano said. "The cost was not the driving factor."

If commissioners approve the changes, the revamped project is expected to be completed in 18 months to two years.

Renovations include sprucing up classrooms and a gymnasium, and demolishing parts of the old youth home.

About 75 juveniles are currently housed at the center. That number fluctuates and is likely to rise soon, Seidelman said.

"I'd be shocked if we don't come near capacity in a few months," he said, referring to full-capacity figure of 120 residents.

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September 20, 2006

Juvenile center to be scaled down

Officials say 190 beds are no longer needed at justice facility; panel to hear new plan today.

Christina Stolarz / The Detroit News

MOUNT CLEMENS -- Macomb County Juvenile Justice Center officials are proposing to scale back their nearly completed detention center for young offenders.

They say there's no longer a need for 190 beds at the facility, which is under construction, because the state Department of Human Services is instead placing abused and neglected kids in foster care.

The revamped center is being built next to the old one, which will be partially demolished.

The total cost of the facility will depend on the number of beds provided. The initial plan would have featured 190 beds at a cost of more than \$23 million.

Under the revamped plan, the estimated center would feature 140 beds -- with 80 designated for detention and 60 set aside for treatment -- at a cost of \$21.5 million.

None of the beds will be used by the abused and neglected kids, said Charles Seidelman, director of the juvenile justice center.

The Budget Committee will consider the proposed bed reduction, along with a stronger focus on community-centered programs and partial demolition of the old youth home, at 9 a.m. today at the Administration Building, 1 S. Main, Mount Clemens.

"The cost (savings) wasn't a driving factor" for the downsizing, said Macomb County Circuit Chief Judge Antonio P. Viviano.

"If we thought 190 beds were necessary, we'd go for that. We think we can do the job."

There are 120 beds at the facility; the other 20 will be available upon completion of the project in 1 1/2 to two years, Seidelman said. About 75 kids live at the secured facility.

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September 20, 2006

Pay up, Oakland to tell state

Commissioners to discuss policy to speed up billing process for foster care, other services.

Maureen Feighan / The Detroit News

PONTIAC -- Oakland County is upping the ante in its dispute with the Michigan Department of Human Services over late foster care bills for abused and neglected kids in the county.

Under a policy to go before the Board of Commissioners on Thursday, county leaders want the state, not the county, to pay social service agencies, foster parents and other care providers. The state, in turn, would bill the county for its 50 percent share.

As it stands now, foster parents and agencies -- which submit their bills to Human Services, which verifies them and then sends them to the county for payment -- are stuck in the middle of the battle of wills between Oakland and the state over its foster care billing process.

County officials, tired of getting some bills two to three years after the fact, have refused to pay more than 400 invoices since Feb. 1 under a policy approved last fall. It requires invoices to be submitted within 60 days of the last day of the month services were provided or they won't be paid.

The power struggle affects not only agencies but also parents and children, Cristina Peixoto, director of children's welfare for Catholic Social Services, which has about \$22,000 in unpaid invoices because they were late.

"Some parents are saying if this child is from Oakland County I don't know if I can take them because I don't know if I'll be paid," she said. "There's a rippling effect."

By making the state pay providers directly, it will be gambling with its own money, and foster parents and social service agencies won't be stuck in the middle, said Tim Soave, the county's director of fiscal services.

"The people who are not being paid are the people providing the services (foster care) while we and DHS battle this out, and that's not fair," Soave said. But state Human Services Department officials question the legality of such an approach. They point to a Michigan 1997 Supreme Court ruling that found that state law requires counties to pay for foster care services.

For years, county officials say they have struggled with late invoices from the state for kids covered by the county's child care fund. The fund covers care for abused and neglected kids considered county wards, of which Oakland has approximately 170.

But with the new 60-day rule in place, 414 invoices worth \$400,000 in services have been rejected since Feb. 1.

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Teacher refused to make Ricky Holland wear special harness

Midday Update

By Kevin Grasha
Lansing State Journal

Ricky Holland's first-grade teacher testified on Tuesday afternoon that his mother Lisa wanted the boy to wear a harness on the special education bus he rode to school.

Peggy Cox, a teacher at Cascades Elementary School in Jackson, said she refused to put Ricky in the harness.

When asked why, she said, "It would be humiliating."

Cox's testimony came on the second day of the trial for Lisa Holland, charged with murder and child abuse in the death of her 7-year-old adopted son. Her husband, Tim Holland, has pleaded guilty to second-degree murder and likely will testify against her. Lisa has said Tim killed Ricky.

Cox also testified Tuesday that Lisa Holland asked her to make daily notes of Ricky's behavior in the classroom. She was to send those notes home with Ricky. Lisa Holland told her she was sharing with the information with Ricky's psychiatrist. Cox said the only problem she had with Ricky was the boy stealing food.

Defense attorneys expected to cross-examine Cox this afternoon.

Earlier in the day, a social worker who saw Ricky Holland from July 2001 to April 2002 testified he told her rope burns on his left wrist were caused by his parents.

Susan Honeck met weekly with Ricky in Jackson while he was a foster child of Tim and Lisa Holland.

Honeck said she discovered very severe burns on Ricky's wrists during a Feb. 21, 2002, session.

"His skin was broken, the burn was deep," Honeck said. When she asked Ricky about the burns, he said they were from the "dog rope."

"It's from the rope that they tie me in bed with at night," Ricky said, according to Honeck.

That same day, the social worker said, she filed a child abuse and neglect report with Jackson County Child Protective Services. But Honeck said she received notice a week later from CPS that her report was not substantiated.

During their meeting the next week, Honeck said Ricky's wrist was healing. When she asked him if

he still gets tied up at night, Ricky said his mother and him made a deal: "I won't pee on the floor, and she won't tie me up," Ricky said.

Defense attorneys - who argued unsuccessfully Tuesday morning that Honeck was relying on hearsay and should not be allowed to testify about what Ricky said - cross-examined the social worker later in the morning. They pointed out that Honeck's report of abuse and neglect was not substantiated. Honeck also testified during cross-examination that the February incident was the only time she ever saw injuries or signs of abuse.

For more on this story, check back to www.lsj.com.

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Mom who stabbed son, set house on fire enters plea

WWMT

September 19, 2006 - 4:39PM



PAW PAW (NEWS 3) - A Decatur woman accused of stabbing her 2-year-old son and setting her house on fire has pleaded guilty to first-degree child abuse.

Police say Angel Gipson confessed to them when they arrived at her Decatur home on Williams Street on January 10.

Despite Gipson's family's pleas that she is mentally ill, she was found competent to stand trial.

The child had to undergo surgery following the attack. He has since recovered from the stab wounds.

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Social worker testifies about Ricky Holland's injuries

LANSING, Mich. -- A social worker testified Tuesday that she discovered severe rope burns on Ricky Holland's wrists four years before the 7-year-old was found dead.

Susan Honeck, who met weekly with Ricky while he was a foster child of Tim and Lisa Holland, said she discovered the injuries during a session in February 2002.

"His skin was broken, the burn was deep," Honeck said in Ingham County Circuit Court. When she asked Ricky about the burns, he said they were from the "dog rope."

"It's from the rope that they tie me in bed with at night," Ricky said, according to Honeck.

The testimony came on the second day of the trial for Lisa Holland, 34, who is charged with felony murder and child abuse in the death of her adopted son. Her husband, Tim Holland, 37, pleaded guilty to second-degree murder in a plea agreement and likely will testify against her.

Honeck said she filed a child abuse and neglect report with Jackson County Child Protective Services the day she noticed Ricky's burns. But Honeck said she received notice a week later from investigators who said her report was not substantiated.

During cross-examination, Honeck acknowledged that the February 2002 incident was the only time she ever saw injuries or signs of abuse during the 10-month period in which she saw Ricky. Lisa Holland's lawyers also pointed out that the abuse report was unsubstantiated.

Ricky vanished from his Williamston home east of Lansing in July 2005. His adoptive parents said he had run away.

In January, Tim Holland led authorities to Ricky's body in an Ingham County marsh after telling them his wife struck the boy in the head with a hammer. Tim Holland said he only helped dispose of the body.

Lisa Holland has said her husband killed Ricky.

Tim and Lisa Holland adopted Ricky in 2003. They also adopted three of Ricky's younger siblings, who are now living with Tim Holland's family.

Lisa Holland faces life in prison if convicted. The trial is expected to last four to six weeks.

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This is a printer friendly version of an article from **The Detroit News**
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September 20, 2006

Letter**GOP tax credit helps poor and aids economy**

The Detroit News' arguments that the recently passed state Earned Income Tax Credit is "irresponsible," "a new entitlement program" and a Democratic governor attempting to "simply shore up her political base" are groundless ("Governor should say how she'll replace tax cut bucks," Sept. 1).

The EITC was a Republican idea, first signed into law by President Gerald Ford in 1975 and expanded significantly by President Ronald Reagan in 1986. Conservative economist Robert J. Barro wrote in a Wall Street Journal column that it "actually helps the working poor in a way that promotes work and discourages welfare."

But Reagan said it best when he called the EITC "the best anti-poverty, the best pro-family, the best job-creation measure to come out of the Congress." All for good reason.

Most government programs have only modest effects at best of increasing work effort and employment. But studies have consistently found the EITC persuades single parents to go to work and lifts more children out of poverty than any government program.

With tremendous support in both the Senate and House, the Legislature on Aug. 30 enacted a state EITC that is based on the federal program and will now provide a similar credit on state income tax returns. This will allow the working poor to keep more of their earnings rather than send them to Lansing, puts more money into the Michigan economy and is a tax cut. It is good policy and the right thing to do. Reagan was right.

State Sen. Ken Sikkema

Majority Leader

R-Wyoming

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